Intra-Communal Violence in Southwest Russia and the Government’s Reaction to Extremism

By: Peter J. Marzalik
Advisors: Dr. Jeffrey Lewis and Dr. Anthony Mughan

Undergraduate International Studies Program, The Ohio State University, 1885 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210

Incident
- terrorist attacks in Kazan, Tatarstan on 19 July 2012
- car bombing wounded Mufti Ildus Faizov, head of the Muslim community in Kazan
- multiple shootings killed Deputy Vailulla Yakupov, head of the Muslim Educational Department in Kazan
- Muhajeddin of Tatarstan claimed responsibility
- extremists’ outrage over moderate prescriptions on Islamic fundamentalism of religious leaders
  “These events remind us once again that the situation in our country is far from ideal. What has happened is a serious signal” – Russian President Vladimir Putin

History
- Ancient Rus and The Golden Horde
  • Tatars and Bashkirs, Turkic peoples descended from the Bulgars who arrived at the region in the 7th century
  • Genghis Khan led Mongol-Tatar invasion, conquering all lands of Ancient Rus and Bulgar Empire by 1242
  • Tsar Ivan IV defeated The Golden Horde, seizing control of the Khanate of Kazan in 1552
- Tsarist Rule over the Russian Empire
  • Peter the Great conducted “civilizing mission” to Muslim-dominated areas of empire
  • Native aristocracies including Tatar nobility integrated into Russian system
  • Catherine the Great passed some policies of religious toleration but exception to oppressive autocratic rule
  • Ethnic minorities as inferiors culturally and economically
- Ethnic Nationalism during the Soviet Union
  • Nationality policy of Lenin granted limited autonomy
  • Great Purges of Stalin demanded Soviet cultural assimilation, collectivization of agriculture, and forced resettlement for ethnic minorities
  • Secret publications of dissenting Tatars and Bashkirs
  • Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, provided breeding ground for growth of Islamic militancy
- Islamic Fundamentalism in Russian Federation
  • Russian constitution granted full autonomy under federalist system to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan
  • First (1994-96) and Second (1999-2009) Chechen Wars
  • Rise of Islamic fundamentalism in North Caucasus

Research Questions
1) Is there a growing trend of nationalist fervor and Islamic radicalization in the autonomous republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan?
2) Is the Russian government actively working to suppress a supposed rise in extremism in these two regions?

Methodology
Constant Comparative Content Analysis:
- rigorous method of analysis in qualitative research using process of inductive reasoning
- choose one incident, critically examine all relatable data, extrapolate new meaning or trend
- review news articles in original Russian and secondary source translations for accuracy
- media censorship in Russia represents important potential confounding factor

Preliminary Results
1) As expressed through the strong rhetoric and protest activities of youth nationalist groups like Azaqlyk (“Freedom”), the sentiment of frustration exists in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, which often provides motivation for radicalization.
2) Many of these youth nationalist groups study the literature and practices of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a non-violent banned Pan-Islamic organization active throughout Central Asia and Southwest Russia with intellectual links to terrorism.
3) As exhibited by the activities of the Federal Security Services (FSB), the Russian government fears and exaggerates the spread of extremism from the North Caucasus to the Volga region, justifying their indiscriminate arrests in the name of national security.
4) Internal conflicts of Russia pose risks for 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, resetting relations with the United States, and international stability in Central Asia.

Future Research
- Critically analyze 5-7 Russian articles per research question to establish proof of trends for increased radicalization and government response
- Collect additional quantitative and qualitative data by conducting survey work in the cities of Kazan and Ufa and by interviewing political officials throughout Tatarstan and Bashkortostan

References